

ABOUT BABIES AND CHILDREN

864 My grandmothers didn't usually learn about childbirth until they were ready to have their first children. I was raised this way, too, and it is one of the things about our customs that I have never understood. As a young girl I used to ask my mother about having children. Either she would ignore me or she would say: "When the time comes, you'll find out about it." She was raised the same way, and so was her mother. My girl friends and I sometimes traded gossip and rumors about the subject, but we never really knew much about it. Some of the things we heard were good, and some were horrifying.

843 I still often hear of the stereotyped Indian mother who has her child alone, out in some field, and then comes back home and continues her work as if nothing happened. If there were Indians who did this, they were sure not my grandmothers. As soon as my grandmothers of the past knew that they were pregnant, they slowed down their work and began a disciplined period during which they were forbidden to do many things.

881 If it was a first pregnancy then the mother-to-be was given advice by an older woman with more experience, often a sister-in-law or the mother-in-law. Some tribes had elaborate ceremonies for girls reaching puberty, but ours did not. Even 864 today a lot of girls in our tribe are really in the dark about having children. With the modern lack of discipline, this has created many problems.

843 If the husband of a pregnant woman could afford a second [595] wife, he often got one at this time, to help out with the household. Otherwise he might ask a younger sister to move in and help—either his own or his wife's sister. If he had a widowed mother or aunt, she might come and do the work instead. His wife's mother was not eligible to help, since she was not allowed to be in the company of her son-in-law.